Letter on "Humanism" [a]

Translated by Frank A. Capuzzi[1]

[145] We are still far from pondering the essence of action decisively enough. We view action only as causing an effect. The actuality of the effect is valued according to its utility. But the essence of action is accomplishment. To accomplish means to unfold something into the fullness of its essence, to lead it forth into this fullness – *producere*. Therefore only what already is can really be accomplished. But what "is" above all is being. Thinking accomplishes the relation of being to the essence of the human being. It does not make or cause the relation. Thinking brings this relation to being solely as something handed over to thought itself from being. Such offering consists in the fact that in thinking being comes to language. Language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home. Their guardianship accomplishes the manifestation of being insofar as they bring this manifestation to language and preserve it in language through their saying. Thinking does not become action only because some effect issues from it or because it is applied. Thinking acts insofar as it thinks. Such action is presumably the simplest and at the same time the highest because it concerns the relation of being to humans. But all working or effecting lies in being and is directed toward beings. Thinking, in contrast, lets itself be claimed by being so that it can say the truth of being. Thinking accomplishes this letting. Thinking is *l'engagement par l'Être pour l'Être* [engagement by being for being]. I do not know whether it is linguistically possible to say both of these (*"par"* and *"pour"*) at once in this way: penser,

[a] First edition, 1949: What is said here was not first thought up when this letter was written, but is based on the course taken by a path that was begun in 1936, in the "moment" of an attempt to say the truth of being in a simple manner. The letter continues to speak in the language of metaphysics, and does so knowingly. The other language remains in the background.

c'est l'engagement de l'Être [thinking is the engagement of being]. Here the possessive form "de l' . . ." is supposed to express both subjective and objective genitive. In this regard "subject" and "object" are inappropriate terms of metaphysics, which very early on in [146] the form of Occidental "logic" and "grammar" seized control of the interpretation of language. We today can only begin to descry what is concealed in that occurrence. The liberation of language from grammar into a more original essential framework is reserved for thought and poetic creation. Thinking is not merely *l'engagement dans l'action* for and by beings, in the sense of whatever is actually present in our current situation. Thinking is *l'engagement* by and for the truth of being. The history of being is never past but stands ever before us; it sustains and defines every *condition et situation humaine*. In order to learn how to experience the aforementioned essence of thinking purely, and that means at the same time to carry it through, we must free ourselves from the technical interpretation of thinking. The beginnings of that interpretation reach back to Plato and Aristotle. They take thinking itself to be a τέχνη, a process of deliberation in service to doing and making. But here deliberation is already seen from the perspective of πρᾶξις and ποίησις. For this reason thinking, when taken for itself, is not "practical." The characterization of thinking as θεωρία and the determination of knowing as "theoretical" comportment occur already within the "technical" interpretation of thinking. Such characterization is a reactive attempt to rescue thinking and preserve its autonomy over against acting and doing. Since then "philosophy" has been in the constant predicament of having to justify its existence before the "sciences." It believes it can do that most effectively by elevating itself to the rank of a science. But such an effort is the abandonment of the essence of thinking. Philosophy is hounded by the fear that it loses prestige and validity if it is not a science. Not to be a science is taken as a failing that is equivalent to being unscientific. Being,[a] as the element of thinking, is abandoned by the technical interpretation of thinking. "Logic," beginning with the Sophists and Plato, sanctions this explanation. [147] Thinking is judged by a standard that does not measure up to it. Such judgment may be compared to the procedure of trying to evaluate the essence and powers of a fish by seeing how long it can live on dry land. For a long time now, all too long, thinking has been stranded on dry land. Can then the effort to return thinking to its element be called "irrationalism"?

[a] First edition, 1949: Being as event of appropriation [*Ereignis*], event of appropriation: the saying [*Sage*]; thinking: renunciative saying in response [*Entsagen*] to the saying of the event of appropriation.

Surely the questions raised in your letter would have been better answered in direct conversation. In written form thinking easily loses its flexibility. But in writing it is difficult above all to retain the multidimensionality of the realm peculiar to thinking. The rigor of thinking,[a] in contrast to that of the sciences, does not consist merely in an artificial, that is, technical-theoretical exactness of concepts. It lies in the fact that saying remains purely in the element of the truth of[2] being and lets the simplicity of its manifold dimensions rule. On the other hand, written composition exerts a wholesome pressure toward deliberate linguistic formulation. Today I would like to grapple with only one of your questions. Perhaps its discussion will also shed some light on the others.

You ask: "Comment redonner un sens au mot 'Humanisme'?" [How can we restore meaning to the word "humanism"?] This question proceeds from your intention to retain the word "humanism." I wonder whether that is necessary. Or is the damage caused by all such terms still not sufficiently obvious? True, "-isms" have for a long time now been suspect. But the market of public opinion continually demands new ones. We are always prepared to supply the demand. Even such names as "logic," "ethics," and "physics" begin to flourish only when originary thinking comes to an end. During the time of their greatness the Greeks thought without such headings. They did not even call thinking "philosophy." Thinking comes to an end when it slips out of its element. The element is what enables thinking to be a thinking. The element is what properly enables: it is the enabling [*das Vermögen*]. It embraces thinking and so brings it into its essence. [148] Said plainly, thinking is the thinking of being. The genitive says something twofold. Thinking is of being inasmuch as thinking, propriated[b] by being, belongs to being. At the same time thinking is of being insofar as thinking, belonging to being, listens to being. As the belonging to being that listens, thinking is what it is according to its essential origin. Thinking is – this says: Being has embraced its essence in a destinal manner in each case. To embrace a "thing" or a "person" in their essence means to love them, to favor them. Thought in a more original way such favoring means the bestowal of their essence as a gift. Such favoring [*Mögen*] is the proper essence of enabling [*Vermögen*], which not only can achieve this or that but also can let something essentially unfold in its provenance, that is, let it be. It is on the "strength" of such enabling by favoring that something is properly able

[a] First edition, 1949: "Thinking" already conceived here as thinking of the truth of being.
[b] First edition, 1949: Only a pointer in the language of metaphysics. For "*Ereignis*," "event of appropriation," has been the guiding word of my thinking since 1936.

to be. This enabling is what is properly "possible" [*das "Mögliche"*], whose essence resides in favoring. From this favoring being enables thinking. The former makes the latter possible. Being is the enabling-favoring, the "may be" [*das "Mög-liche"*]. As the element, being is the "quiet power" of the favoring-enabling, that is, of the possible. Of course, our words *möglich* [possible] and *Möglichkeit* [possibility], under the dominance of "logic" and "metaphysics," are thought solely in contrast to "actuality"; that is, they are thought on the basis of a definite – the metaphysical – interpretation of being as *actus* and *potentia*, a distinction identified with that between *existentia* and *essentia*.[3] When I speak of the "quiet power of the possible" I do not mean the *possibile* of a merely represented *possibilitas*, nor *potentia* as the *essentia* of an *actus* of *existentia;* rather, I mean being itself, which in its favoring presides over thinking and hence over the essence of humanity, and that means over its relation to being. To enable something here means to preserve it in its essence, to maintain it in its element.

When thinking comes to an end by slipping out of its element it replaces this loss by procuring a validity for itself as τέχνη, as an instrument of education and therefore as a classroom matter [149] and later a cultural concern. By and by philosophy becomes a technique for explaining from highest causes. One no longer thinks; one occupies oneself with "philosophy." In competition with one another, such occupations publicly offer themselves as "-isms" and try to outdo one another. The dominance of such terms is not accidental. It rests above all in the modern age upon the peculiar dictatorship of the public realm. However, so-called "private existence" is not really essential, that is to say free, human being. It simply ossifies in a denial of the public realm. It remains an offshoot that depends upon the public and nourishes itself by a mere withdrawal from it. Hence it testifies, against its own will, to its subservience to the public realm. But because it stems from the dominance of subjectivity the public realm itself is the metaphysically conditioned establishment and authorization of the openness of beings in the unconditional objectification of everything. Language thereby falls into the service of expediting communication along routes where objectification – the uniform accessibility of everything to everyone – branches out and disregards all limits. In this way language comes under the dictatorship of the public realm, which decides in advance what is intelligible and what must be rejected as unintelligible. What is said in *Being and Time* (1927), sections 27 and 35, about the "they" in no way means to furnish an incidental contribution to sociology. Just as little does the "they" mean merely the opposite, understood in an ethical-existentiell way, of the selfhood of persons. Rather, what is said there contains a reference, thought in terms of the

question of the truth of being, to the primordial belonging of the word to being. This relation remains concealed amid the dominance of subjectivity that presents itself as the public realm. But if the truth of being has become thought-provoking for thinking, then reflection on the essence of language must also attain a different rank. It can no longer be a mere philosophy of language. [150] That is the only reason *Being and Time* (section 34) contains a reference to the essential dimension of language and touches upon the simple question as to what mode of being language as language in any given case has. The widely and rapidly spreading devastation of language not only undermines aesthetic and moral responsibility in every use of language; it arises from a threat to the essence of humanity. A merely cultivated use of language is still no proof that we have as yet escaped this danger to our essence. These days, in fact, such usage might sooner testify that we have not yet seen and cannot see the danger because we have never yet placed ourselves in view of it. Much bemoaned of late, and much too lately, the decline of language is, however, not the grounds for, but already a consequence of, the state of affairs in which language under the dominance of the modern metaphysics of subjectivity almost irremediably falls out of its element. Language still denies us its essence: that it is the house of the truth of being. Instead, language surrenders itself to our mere willing and trafficking as an instrument of domination over beings. Beings themselves appear as actualities in the interaction of cause and effect. We encounter beings as actualities in a calculative businesslike way, but also scientifically and by way of philosophy, with explanations and proofs. Even the assurance that something is inexplicable belongs to these explanations and proofs. With such statements we believe that we confront the mystery. As if it were already decided that the truth of being lets itself at all be established in causes and explanatory grounds or, what comes to the same, in their incomprehensibility.

But if the human being is to find his way once again into the nearness of being he must first learn to exist in the nameless. In the same way he must recognize the seductions of the public realm as well as the impotence of the private. Before he speaks the human being must first let himself be claimed again by being, taking the risk that under this claim he will seldom have much to say. Only thus will [151] the pricelessness of its essence be once more bestowed upon the word, and upon humans a home for dwelling in the truth of being.

But in the claim upon human beings, in the attempt to make humans ready for this claim, is there not implied a concern about human beings? Where else does "care" tend but in the direction of bringing the human being back to his essence? What else does that in turn betoken but that

man (*homo*) become human (*humanus*)? Thus *humanitas* really does remain the concern of such thinking. For this is humanism: meditating and caring, that human beings be human and not inhumane, "inhuman," that is, outside their essence. But in what does the humanity of the human being consist? It lies in his essence.

But whence and how is the essence of the human being determined? Marx demands that "the human being's humanity" be recognized and acknowledged. He finds it in "society." The "social" human is for him the "natural" human. In "society" human "nature," that is, the totality of "natural needs" (food, clothing, reproduction, economic sufficiency), is equably secured. The Christian sees the humanity of man, the *humanitas* of *homo*, in contradistinction to *Deitas*. He is the human being of the history of redemption who as a "child of God" hears and accepts the call of the Father in Christ. The human being is not of this world, since the "world," thought in terms of Platonic theory, is only a temporary passage to the beyond.

Humanitas, explicitly so called, was first considered and striven for in the age of the Roman Republic. *Homo humanus* was opposed to *homo barbarus*. *Homo humanus* here means the Romans, who exalted and honored Roman *virtus* through the "embodiment" of the παιδεία [education] taken over from the Greeks. These were the Greeks of the Hellenistic age, whose culture was acquired in the [152] schools of philosophy. It was concerned with *eruditio et institutio in bonas artes* [scholarship and training in good conduct]. Παιδεία thus understood was translated as *humanitas*. The genuine *romanitas* of *homo romanus* consisted in such *humanitas*. We encounter the first humanism in Rome: it therefore remains in essence a specifically Roman phenomenon, which emerges from the encounter of Roman civilization with the culture of late Greek civilization. The so-called Renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Italy is a *renascentia romanitatis*. Because *romanitas* is what matters, it is concerned with *humanitas* and therefore with Greek παιδεία. But Greek civilization is always seen in its later form and this itself is seen from a Roman point of view. The *homo romanus* of the Renaissance also stands in opposition to *homo barbarus*. But now the in-humane is the supposed barbarism of Gothic Scholasticism in the Middle Ages. Therefore a *studium humanitatis*, which in a certain way reaches back to the ancients and thus also becomes a revival of Greek civilization, always adheres to historically understood humanism. For Germans this is apparent in the humanism of the eighteenth century supported by Winckelmann, Goethe, and Schiller. On the other hand, Hölderlin does not belong to "humanism," precisely because he thought the destiny of the essence of the human being in a more original way than "humanism" could.

But if one understands humanism in general as a concern that the human being become free for his humanity and find his worth in it, then humanism differs according to one's conception of the "freedom" and "nature" of the human being. So too are there various paths toward the realization of such conceptions. The humanism of Marx does not need to return to antiquity any more than the humanism that Sartre conceives existentialism to be. In this broad sense Christianity too is a humanism, in that according to its teaching everything depends on human salvation (*salus aeterna*); the history of the [153] human being appears in the context of the history of redemption. However different these forms of humanism may be in purpose and in principle, in the mode and means of their respective realizations, and in the form of their teaching, they nonetheless all agree in this, that the *humanitas* of *homo humanus* is determined with regard to an already established interpretation of nature, history, world, and the ground of the world, that is, of beings as a whole.

Every humanism is either grounded in a metaphysics or is itself made to be the ground of one. Every determination of the essence of the human being that already presupposes an interpretation of beings without asking about the truth of being, whether knowingly or not, is metaphysical. The result is that what is peculiar to all metaphysics, specifically with respect to the way the essence of the human being is determined, is that it is "humanistic." Accordingly, every humanism remains metaphysical. In defining the humanity of the human being, humanism not only does not ask about the relation of being[a] to the essence of the human being; because of its metaphysical origin humanism even impedes the question by neither recognizing nor understanding it. On the contrary, the necessity and proper form of the question concerning the truth of being, forgotten[b] in and through metaphysics, can come to light only if the question "What is metaphysics?" is posed in the midst of metaphysics' domination. Indeed, every inquiry into "being," even the one into the truth of being, must at first introduce its inquiry as a "metaphysical" one.

The first humanism, Roman humanism, and every kind that has emerged from that time to the present, has presupposed the most universal "essence" of the human being to be obvious. The human being is considered to be an *animal rationale*. This definition is not simply the Latin translation of

[a] First edition, 1949: "Being" and "being itself" at once enter the *isolation of the Absolute* through this way of saying things. Yet so long as the event of appropriation is held back, this way of saying things is unavoidable.

[b] *Plato's Doctrine of Truth*, first edition, 1947: But this "forgetting" is to be thought starting from Ἀλήθεια in terms of the event of appropriation.

the Greek ζῷον λόγον ἔχον, but rather a metaphysical interpretation of it. This essential definition of the human being is [154] not false. But it is conditioned by metaphysics. The essential provenance of metaphysics, and not just its limits, became questionable in *Being and Time*. What is questionable is above all commended to thinking as what is to be thought, but not at all left to the gnawing doubts of an empty skepticism.

Metaphysics does indeed represent beings in their being, and so it also[4] thinks the being of beings. But it does not think being as such,[5] does not think the difference between being and beings. (Cf. "On the Essence of Ground" [1929], p. 8; also *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* [1929], p. 225; and *Being and Time*, p. 230.) Metaphysics does not ask about the truth of being itself. Nor does it therefore ask in what way the essence of the human being belongs to the truth of being. Metaphysics has not only failed up to now to ask this question, the question is inaccessible to metaphysics as such. Being is still waiting for the time when It itself will become thought-provoking to the human being. With regard to the definition of the essence of the human being, however one may determine the *ratio* of the *animal* and the reason of the living being, whether as a "faculty of principles" or a "faculty of categories" or in some other way, the essence of reason is always and in each case grounded in this: for every apprehending of beings in their being, being in each case[6] is already cleared, it is[7] propriated in its truth. So too with *animal*, ζῷον, an interpretation of "life" is already posited that necessarily lies in an interpretation of beings as ζωή and φύσις, within which what is living appears. Above and beyond everything else, however, it finally remains to ask[8] whether the essence of the human being primordially and most decisively lies in the dimension of *animalitas* at all. Are we really on the right track toward the essence of the human being as long as we set him off as one living creature among others in contrast to plants, beasts, and God? We can proceed in that way; we can in such fashion locate the human being among beings as one being among others. We will thereby always be able to state something correct about the human being. [155] But we must be clear on this point, that when we do this we abandon the human being to the essential realm of *animalitas* even if we do not equate him with beasts but attribute a specific difference to him. In principle we are still thinking of *homo animalis* – even when *anima* [soul] is posited as *animus sive mens* [spirit or mind], and this in turn is later posited as subject, person, or spirit. Such positing is the manner of metaphysics. But then the essence of the human being is too little heeded and not thought in its origin, the essential provenance that is always the essential future for historical mankind. Metaphysics thinks of the human

being on the basis of *animalitas* and does not think in the direction of his *humanitas*.

Metaphysics closes itself to the simple essential fact that the human being essentially occurs in his essence only where he is claimed by being. Only from that claim "has" he found that wherein his essence dwells. Only from this dwelling does he "have" "language" as the home that preserves the ecstatic for his essence. Such standing in the clearing of being I call the ek-sistence of human beings. This way of being is proper only to the human being. Ek-sistence so understood is not only the ground of the possibility of reason, *ratio*, but is also that in which the essence of the human being preserves the source that determines him.

Ek-sistence can be said only of the essence of the human being, that is, only of the human way "to be." For as far as our experience shows, only the human being is admitted to the destiny of ek-sistence. Therefore ek-sistence can also never be thought of as a specific kind of living creature among others – granted that the human being is destined to think the essence of his being and not merely to give accounts of the nature and history of his constitution and activities. Thus even what we attribute to the human being as *animalitas* on the basis of the comparison with "beasts" is itself grounded in the essence of ek-sistence. The human body is something essentially [156] other than an animal organism. Nor is the error of biologism overcome by adjoining a soul to the human body, a mind to the soul, and the existentiell to the mind, and then louder than before singing the praises of the mind – only to let everything relapse into "life-experience," with a warning that thinking by its inflexible concepts disrupts the flow of life and that thought of being distorts existence. The fact that physiology and physiological chemistry can scientifically investigate the human being as an organism is no proof that in this "organic" thing, that is, in the body scientifically explained, the essence of the human being consists. That has as little validity as the notion that the essence of nature has been discovered in atomic energy. It could even be that nature, in the face it turns toward the human being's technical mastery, is simply concealing its essence. Just as little as the essence of the human being consists in being an animal organism can this insufficient definition of the essence of the human being be overcome or offset by outfitting the human being with an immortal soul, the power of reason, or the character of a person. In each instance its essence is passed over, and passed over on the basis of the same metaphysical projection.

What the human being is – or, as it is called in the traditional language of metaphysics, the "essence" of the human being – lies in his ek-sistence.

But ek-sistence thought in this way is not identical with the traditional concept of *existentia*, which means actuality in contrast to the meaning of *essentia* as possibility. In *Being and Time* (p. 42) this sentence is italicized: "The 'essence' of Dasein lies in its existence." However, here the opposition between *existentia* and *essentia* is not what is at issue, because neither of these metaphysical determinations of being, let alone their relationship, is yet in question. Still less does the sentence contain a universal statement [157] about *Dasein*, in the sense in which this word came into fashion in the eighteenth century, as a name for "object," intending to express the metaphysical concept of the actuality of the actual. On the contrary, the sentence says: the human being occurs essentially in such a way that he is the "there" [*das "Da"*], that is, the clearing of being. The "being" of the *Da*, and only it, has the fundamental character of ek-sistence, that is, of an ecstatic inherence in the truth of being. The ecstatic essence of the human being consists in ek-sistence, which is different from the metaphysically conceived *existentia*. Medieval philosophy conceives the latter as *actualitas*. Kant represents *existentia* as actuality in the sense of the objectivity of experience. Hegel defines *existentia* as the self-knowing Idea of absolute subjectivity. Nietzsche grasps *existentia* as the eternal recurrence of the same. Here it remains an open question whether through *existentia* – in these explanations of it as actuality that at first seem quite different – the being of a stone or even life as the being of plants and animals is adequately thought. In any case living creatures are as they are without standing outside their being as such and within the truth of being, preserving in such standing the essential nature of their being. Of all the beings that are, presumably the most difficult to think about are living creatures, because on the one hand they are in a certain way most closely akin to us, and on the other they are at the same time separated from our ek-sistent essence by an abyss. However, it might also seem as though the essence of divinity is closer to us than what is so alien in other living creatures, closer, namely, in an essential distance that, however distant, is nonetheless more familiar to our ek-sistent essence than is our scarcely conceivable, abysmal bodily kinship with the beast. Such reflections cast a strange light upon the current and therefore always still premature designation of the human being as *animal rationale*. Because plants and animals are lodged in their respective environments but are never placed freely into the clearing of being which alone is "world," they lack language. [158] But in being denied language they are not thereby suspended worldlessly in their environment. Still, in this word "environment" converges all that is puzzling about living creatures. In its essence, language is not the utterance of an organism; nor is it

the expression of a living thing. Nor can it ever be thought in an essentially correct way in terms of its symbolic character, perhaps not even in terms of the character of signification. Language is the clearing-concealing advent of being itself.

Ek-sistence, thought in terms of ecstasis, does not coincide with *existentia* in either form or content. In terms of content ek-sistence means standing out[a] into the truth of being. *Existentia* (*existence*) means in contrast *actualitas*, actuality as opposed to mere possibility as Idea. Ek-sistence identifies the determination of what the human being is in the destiny of truth. *Existentia* is the name for the realization of something that is as it appears in its Idea. The sentence "The human being ek-sists" is not an answer to the question of whether the human being actually is or not; rather, it responds to the question concerning the "essence" of the human being. We are accustomed to posing this question with equal impropriety whether we ask what the human being is or who he is. For in the *Who?* or the *What?* we are already on the lookout for something like a person or an object. But the personal no less than the objective misses and misconstrues the essential unfolding of ek-sistence in the history of being. That is why the sentence cited from *Being and Time* (p. 42) is careful to enclose the word "essence" in quotation marks. This indicates that "essence" is now being defined neither from *esse essentiae* nor from *esse existentiae* but rather from the ek-static character of Dasein. As ek-sisting, the human being sustains Da-sein in that he takes the *Da*, the clearing of being, into "care." But Da-sein itself occurs essentially as "thrown." It unfolds essentially in the throw of being as a destinal sending.

But it would be the ultimate error if one wished to explain the sentence about the human being's eksistent essence as if it were the [159] secularized transference to human beings of a thought that Christian theology expresses about God (*Deus est ipsum esse*[9] [God is his being]); for ek-sistence is not the realization of an essence, nor does ek-sistence itself even effect and posit what is essential. If we understand what *Being and Time* calls "projection" as a representational positing, we take it to be an achievement of subjectivity and do not think it in the only way the "understanding of being" in the context of the "existential analysis" of "being-in-the-world" can be thought – namely, as the ecstatic relation[b] to the clearing of being. The adequate execution and completion of this other thinking that abandons subjectivity is surely made more difficult by the fact that in the publication of *Being and Time* the third division of the first part, "Time and Being," was

[a] *Plato's Doctrine of Truth*, first edition, 1947: "Out": into the "out" of the "out of one another" of the difference (the "there"), not "out" out of an interior.

[b] First edition, 1949: Imprecise, better: ekstatic in-standing within the clearing.

held back (cf. *Being and Time*, p. 39). Here everything[a] is reversed. The division in question was held back because thinking failed in the adequate saying[b] of this turning [*Kehre*] and did not succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics. The lecture "On the Essence of Truth," thought out and delivered in 1930 but not printed until 1943, provides a certain insight into the thinking of the turning from "Being and Time" to "Time and Being." This turning is not a change of standpoint[c] from *Being and Time*, but in it the thinking that was sought first arrives at the locality of that dimension out of which *Being and Time* is experienced, that is to say, experienced in[10] the fundamental experience of the oblivion of being.[d]

By way of contrast, Sartre expresses the basic tenet of existentialism in this way: Existence precedes essence. In this statement he is taking *existentia* and *essentia* according to their metaphysical meaning, which from Plato's time on has said that *essentia* precedes *existentia*. Sartre reverses this statement. But the reversal of a metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement. With it he stays with metaphysics in oblivion of the truth of being. For even if philosophy wishes to determine the relation of *essentia* and *existentia* in the sense it had in medieval controversies, in Leibniz's sense, or in some other way, it still [160] remains to ask first of all from what destiny of being this differentiation[e] in being as *esse essentiae* and *esse existentiae* comes to appear to thinking. We have yet to consider why the question about the destiny of being was never asked and why it could never be thought. Or is the fact that this is how it is with the differentiation of *essentia* and *existentia* not a sign of forgetfulness of being? We must presume that this destiny does not rest upon a mere failure of human thinking, let alone upon a lesser capacity of early Western thinking. Concealed in its essential provenance, the differentiation of *essentia* (essentiality) and *existentia* (actuality) completely dominates the destiny of Western history and of all history determined by Europe.

Sartre's key proposition about the priority of *existentia* over *essentia* does, however, justify using the name "existentialism" as an appropriate title for a philosophy of this sort. But the basic tenet of "existentialism" has nothing at all in common with the statement from *Being and Time* – apart from the

[a] First edition, 1949: In terms of the "what" and "how" of that which is thought-worthy and of thinking.

[b] First edition, 1949: Letting itself show.

[c] First edition, 1949: I.e., of the question of being.

[d] First edition, 1949: Forgottenness – Λήθη – concealing – withdrawal – expropriation: event of appropriation.

[e] First edition, 1949: This distinction, however, is not identical with the ontological difference. Within the latter, the said distinction belongs on the "side" of being.

fact that in *Being and Time* no statement about the relation of *essentia* and *existentia* can yet be expressed, since there it is still a question of preparing something precursory. As is obvious from what we have just said, that happens clumsily enough. What still today remains to be said could perhaps become an impetus for guiding the essence of the human being to the point where it thoughtfully attends to that dimension of the truth of being that thoroughly governs it. But even this could take place only to the honor of being and for the benefit of Da-sein, which the human being ek-sistingly sustains; not, however, for the sake of the human being, so that civilization and culture through human doings might be vindicated.

But in order that we today may attain to the dimension of the truth of being in order to ponder it, we should first of all make clear how being concerns the human being and how it claims him. Such an essential experience happens to us when it dawns on us that [161] the human being is in that he ek-sists. Were we now to say this in the language of the tradition, it would run: the ek-sistence of the human being is his substance. That is why in *Being and Time* the sentence often recurs, "The 'substance' of the human being is existence" (pp. 117, 212, 314). But "substance," thought in terms of the history of being, is already a blanket translation of οὐσία, a word that designates the presence of what is present and at the same time, with puzzling ambiguity, usually means what is present itself. If we think the metaphysical term "substance" in the sense already suggested in accordance with the "phenomenological destruction" carried out in *Being and Time* (cf. p. 25), then the statement "The 'substance' of the human being is ek-sistence" says nothing else but that the way that the human being in his proper essence becomes present to being is ecstatic inherence in the truth of being. Through this determination of the essence of the human being the humanistic interpretations of the human being as *animal rationale*, as "person," as spiritual-ensouled-bodily being, are not declared false and thrust aside. Rather, the sole implication is that the highest determinations of the essence of the human being in humanism still do not realize the proper dignity[a] of the human being. To that extent the thinking in *Being and Time* is against humanism. But this opposition does not mean that such thinking aligns itself against the humane and advocates the inhuman, that it promotes the inhumane and deprecates the dignity of the human being. Humanism is opposed because it does not set the *humanitas* of the human being high enough. Of course the essential worth of the human being does

[a] First edition, 1949: The dignity proper to him, i.e., that has come to be appropriate, appropriated in the event: propriation and event of appropriation.

not consist in his being the substance of beings, as the "Subject" among them, so that as the tyrant of being he may deign to release the beingness of beings into an all too loudly glorified "objectivity."

The human being is rather "thrown" by being itself into the truth of being, so that ek-sisting in this fashion he might guard the truth of being, in order that beings might appear in the light of being [162] as the beings they are. Human beings do not decide whether and how beings appear, whether and how God and the gods or history and nature come forward into the clearing of being, come to presence and depart. The advent of beings lies in the destiny[a] of being. But for humans it is ever a question of finding what is fitting in their essence that corresponds to such destiny; for in accord with this destiny the human being as ek-sisting has to guard the truth of being. The human being is the shepherd of being. It is in this direction alone that *Being and Time* is thinking when ecstatic existence is experienced as "care" (cf. section 44c, pp. 226ff.).

Yet being – what is being? It "is"[11] It itself. The thinking that is to come must learn to experience that and to say it. "Being" – that is not God and not a cosmic ground. Being is essentially[12] farther[b] than all beings and is yet nearer to the human being than every being, be it a rock, a beast, a work of art, a machine, be it an angel or God. Being is the nearest. Yet the near remains farthest[13] from the human being. Human beings at first cling always and only to beings. But when thinking represents beings as beings it no doubt relates itself to being. In truth, however, it always thinks only of beings as such; precisely not, and never, being as such. The "question of being" always remains a question about beings. It is still not at all what its elusive name indicates: the question in the direction of being. Philosophy, even when it becomes "critical" through Descartes and Kant, always follows the course of metaphysical representation. It thinks from beings back to beings with a glance in passing toward being. For every departure from beings and every return to them stands already in the light of being.

But metaphysics recognizes the clearing of being either solely as the view of what is present in "outward appearance" (ἰδέα) or critically as what is seen in the perspect of categorial representation on the part of subjectivity. This means that the truth of being as the clearing itself remains concealed for metaphysics. [163] However, this concealment is not a defect of metaphysics but a treasure withheld from it yet held before it, the treasure of

[a] First edition, 1949: Gathered sending [*Ge-schick*]: gathering of the epochs of being used by the need of letting-presence.

[b] First edition, 1949: Expanse: not that of an embracing, but rather of the locality of appropriation; as the expanse of the clearing.

its own proper wealth. But the clearing itself is being. Within the destiny of being in metaphysics the clearing first affords a view by which what is present comes into touch with the human being, who is present to it, so that the human being himself can in apprehending (νοεῖν) first touch upon being (θιγεῖν, Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Θ, 10). This view first draws the perspect toward it. It abandons itself to such a perspect when apprehending has become a setting-forth-before-itself in the *perceptio* of the *res cogitans* taken as the *subiectum* of *certitudo*.

But how – provided we really ought to ask such a question at all – how does being relate to ek-sistence? Being itself is the relation[a] to the extent that It, as the locality of the truth of being amid beings, gathers to itself and embraces ek-sistence in its existential, that is, ecstatic, essence. Because the human being as the one who ek-sists comes to stand in this relation that being destines for itself, in that he ecstatically sustains it, that is, in care takes it upon himself, he at first fails to recognize the nearest and attaches himself to the next nearest. He even thinks that this is the nearest. But nearer than the nearest, than beings,[14] and at the same time for ordinary thinking farther than the farthest is nearness itself: the truth of being.

Forgetting the truth of being in favor of the pressing throng of beings unthought in their essence is what "falling" [*Verfallen*] means in *Being and Time*. This word does not signify the Fall of Man understood in a "moral-philosophical" and at the same time secularized way; rather, it designates an essential relationship of humans to being within being's relation to the essence of the human being. Accordingly, the terms "authenticity"[b] and "inauthenticity," which are used in a provisional fashion, do not imply a moral-existentiell or an "anthropological" distinction but rather a relation that, because it has been hitherto concealed from philosophy, has yet to be thought for the first time, an "ecstatic" relation of the essence of the human being to the truth of being. But this [164] relation is as it is not by reason of ek-sistence; on the contrary, the essence of ek-sistence is destined[15] existentially-ecstatically from the essence of the truth of being.

The one thing thinking would like to attain and for the first time tries to articulate in *Being and Time* is something simple. As such, being remains mysterious, the simple nearness of an unobtrusive prevailing. The nearness[c] occurs essentially as language itself. But language is not mere

[a] *Plato's Doctrine of Truth*, first edition, 1947: Relation from out of restraint (withholding) of refusal (of withdrawal).

[b] First edition, 1949: To be thought from out of what is proper to ap-propriating.

[c] First edition, 1949: In the sense of nearing: holding ready in clearing, holding as safeguarding.

speech, insofar as we represent the latter at best as the unity of phoneme (or written character), melody, rhythm, and meaning (or sense). We think of the phoneme and written character as a verbal body for language, of melody and rhythm as its soul, and whatever has to do with meaning as its spirit. We usually think of language as corresponding to the essence of the human being represented as *animal rationale*, that is, as the unity of body-soul-spirit. But just as ek-sistence – and through it the relation of the truth of being to the human being – remains veiled in the *humanitas* of *homo animalis*, so does the metaphysical-animal explanation of language cover up the essence of language in the history of being. According to this essence, language is the house of being, which is propriated by being and pervaded by being. And so it is proper to think the essence of language from its correspondence to being and indeed as this correspondence, that is, as the home of the human being's essence.

But the human being is not only a living creature who possesses language along with other capacities. Rather, language is the house of being in which the human being ek-sists by dwelling, in that he belongs to the truth of being, guarding it.

So the point is that in the determination of the humanity of the human being as ek-sistence what is essential is not the human being but being – as the dimension of the ecstasis of ek-sistence. However, the dimension is not something spatial in the familiar sense. Rather, everything spatial[a] and all time-space occur essentially in the dimensionality that being itself is.

[165] Thinking attends to these simple relationships. It tries to find the right word for them within the long-traditional language and grammar of metaphysics. But does such thinking – granted that there is something in a name – still allow itself to be described as humanism? Certainly not so far as humanism thinks metaphysically. Certainly not if humanism is existentialism and is represented by what Sartre expresses: précisément nous sommes sur un plan où il y a seulement des hommes [We are precisely in a situation where there are only human beings] (*Existentialism Is a Humanism*, p. 36). Thought from *Being and Time*, this should say instead: précisément nous sommes sur un plan où il y a principalement l'Être [We are precisely in a situation where principally there is being]. But where does *le plan* come from and what is it? *L'Être et le plan* are the same. In *Being and Time* (p. 212) we purposely and cautiously say, il y a l'Être: "there is / it gives" ["*es gibt*"] being. *Il y a* translates "it gives" imprecisely. For the "it" that here "gives" is

[a] *Plato's Doctrine of Truth*, first edition, 1947: Space neither alongside time, nor dissolved into time, nor deduced from time.

being itself. The "gives" names the essence of being that is giving, granting its truth. The self-giving into the open, along with the open region itself, is being itself.

At the same time "it gives" is used preliminarily to avoid the locution "being is"; for "is" is commonly said of some thing that is. We call such a thing a being. But being "is" precisely not "a being." If "is" is spoken without a closer interpretation of being, then being is all too easily represented as a "being" after the fashion of the familiar sorts of beings that act as causes and are actualized as effects. And yet Parmenides, in the early age of thinking, says, ἔστι γὰρ εἶναι, "for there is being." The primal mystery for all thinking is concealed in this phrase. Perhaps "is" can be said only of being in an appropriate way, so that no individual being ever properly "is." But because thinking should be directed only toward saying being in its truth, instead of explaining it as a particular being in terms of beings, whether and how being is must remain an open question for the careful attention of thinking.

The ἔστι γὰρ εἶναι of Parmenides is still unthought today. That allows us to gauge how things stand with the progress of philosophy. [166] When philosophy attends to its essence it does not make forward strides at all. It remains where it is in order constantly to think the Same. Progression, that is, progression forward from this place, is a mistake that follows thinking as the shadow that thinking itself casts. Because being is still unthought, *Being and Time* too says of it, "there is / it gives." Yet one cannot speculate about this *il y a* precipitately and without a foothold. This "there is / it gives" rules as the destiny of being. Its history comes to language in the words of essential thinkers. Therefore the thinking that thinks into the truth of being is, as thinking, historical. There is not a "systematic" thinking and next to it an illustrative history of past opinions. Nor is there, as Hegel thought, only a systematics that can fashion the law of its thinking into the law of history and simultaneously subsume history into the system. Thought in a more primordial way, there is the history of being to which thinking belongs as recollection of this history, propriated by it. Such recollective thought differs essentially from the subsequent presentation of history in the sense of an evanescent past. History does not take place primarily as a happening. And its happening is not evanescence. The happening of history occurs essentially as the destiny of the truth of being and from it (cf. the lecture on Hölderlin's hymn "As when on feast day . . ." [1941], p. 31). Being comes to its destiny in that It, being, gives itself. But thought in terms of such destiny this says: It gives itself and refuses itself simultaneously. Nonetheless, Hegel's definition of history as

the development of "Spirit" is not untrue. Neither is it partly correct and partly false. It is as true as metaphysics, which through Hegel first brings to language its essence – thought in terms of the absolute – in the system. Absolute metaphysics, with its Marxian and Nietzschean inversions, belongs to the history of the truth of being. Whatever stems from it cannot be countered or even cast aside by refutations. It can only be taken up in such a way that its truth is more primordially sheltered in being itself [167] and removed from the domain of mere human opinion. All refutation in the field of essential thinking is foolish. Strife among thinkers is the "lovers' quarrel" concerning the matter itself. It assists them mutually toward a simple belonging to the Same, from which they find what is fitting for them in the destiny of being.

Assuming that in the future the human being will be able to think the truth of being, he will think from ek-sistence. The human being stands ek-sistingly in the destiny of being. The ek-sistence of the human being is historical as such, but not only or primarily because so much happens to the human being and to things human in the course of time. Because it must think the ek-sistence of Da-sein, the thinking of *Being and Time* is essentially concerned that the historicity of Dasein be experienced.

But does not *Being and Time* say on p. 212, where the "there is / it gives" comes to language, "Only so long as Dasein is, is there [*gibt es*] being"? To be sure. It means that only so long as the clearing of being propriates does being convey itself to human beings. But the fact that the *Da*, the clearing as the truth of being itself, propriates is the dispensation of being itself. This is the destiny of the clearing. But the sentence does not mean that the Dasein of the human being in the traditional sense of *existentia*, and thought in modern philosophy as the actuality of the *ego cogito*, is that entity through which being is first fashioned. The sentence does not say that being is the product of the human being. The Introduction to *Being and Time* (p. 38) says simply and clearly, even in italics, "Being is the *transcendens* pure and simple." Just as the openness of spatial nearness seen from the perspective of a particular thing exceeds all things near and far, so is being essentially broader than all beings, because it is the clearing itself. For all that, being is thought on the basis of beings, a consequence of the approach – at first unavoidable – within a metaphysics that is still dominant. Only from such a perspective does being show itself in and as a transcending.

[168] The introductory definition, "Being is the *transcendens* pure and simple," articulates in one simple sentence the way the essence of being hitherto has been cleared for the human being. This retrospective definition of the essence of the being of beings[16] from the clearing of beings

as such[17] remains indispensable for the prospective approach of thinking toward the question concerning the truth of being. In this way thinking attests to its essential unfolding as destiny. It is far from the arrogant presumption that wishes to begin anew and declares all past philosophy false. But whether the definition of being as the *transcendens* pure and simple really does name the simple essence of the truth of being – this and this alone is the primary question for a thinking that attempts to think the truth of being. That is why we also say (p. 230) that how being *is*, is to be understood chiefly from its "meaning" [*Sinn*], that is, from the truth of being. Being is cleared for the human being in ecstatic projection [*Entwurf*]. But this projection does not create being.

Moreover, the projection is essentially a thrown projection. What throws in such projection is not the human being but being itself, which sends the human being into the ek-sistence of Da-sein that is his essence. This destiny propriates as the clearing of being – which it is. The clearing grants nearness to being. In this nearness, in the clearing of the *Da*, the human being dwells as the ek-sisting one without yet being able properly to experience and take over this dwelling today. In the lecture on Hölderlin's elegy "Homecoming" (1943) this nearness "of" being, which the *Da* of Dasein is, is thought on the basis of *Being and Time*; it is perceived as spoken from the minstrel's poem; from the experience of the oblivion of being it is called the "homeland." The word is thought here in an essential sense, not patriotically or nationalistically, but in terms of the history of being. The essence of the homeland, however, is also mentioned with the intention of thinking the homelessness of contemporary human beings from the essence of being's history. Nietzsche was the last to experience this homelessness. [169] From within metaphysics he was unable to find any other way out than a reversal of metaphysics. But that is the height of futility. On the other hand, when Hölderlin composes "Homecoming" he is concerned that his "countrymen" find their essence. He does not at all seek that essence in an egoism of his people. He sees it rather in the context of a belongingness to the destiny of the West. But even the West is not thought regionally as the Occident in contrast to the Orient, nor merely as Europe, but rather world-historically out of nearness to the source. We have still scarcely begun to think the mysterious relations to the East that have come to word in Hölderlin's poetry (cf. "The Ister"; also "The Journey," third strophe ff.). "German" is not spoken to the world so that the world might be reformed through the German essence; rather, it is spoken to the Germans so that from a destinal belongingness to other peoples they might become world-historical along with them (see remarks on Hölderlin's poem

"Remembrance" ["*Andenken*"]. *Tübinger Gedenkschrift* [1943], p. 322). The homeland of this historical dwelling is nearness to being.[a]

In such nearness, if at all, a decision may be made as to whether and how God and the gods withhold their presence and the night remains, whether and how the day of the holy dawns, whether and how in the upsurgence of the holy an epiphany of God and the gods can begin anew. But the holy, which alone is the essential sphere of divinity, which in turn alone affords a dimension for the gods and for God, comes to radiate only when being itself beforehand and after extensive preparation has been cleared and is experienced in its truth. Only thus does the overcoming of homelessness begin from being, a homelessness in which not only human beings but the essence of the human being stumbles aimlessly about.

Homelessness so understood consists in the abandonment of beings by being. Homelessness is the symptom of oblivion of being. Because of it the truth of being remains unthought. The oblivion of being makes itself known indirectly through the fact that the [170] human being always observes and handles only beings. Even so, because humans cannot avoid having some notion of being, it is explained merely as what is "most general" and therefore as something that encompasses beings, or as a creation of the infinite being, or as the product of a finite subject. At the same time "being" has long stood for "beings" and, inversely, the latter for the former, the two of them caught in a curious and still unraveled confusion.

As the destiny that sends truth, being remains concealed. But the destiny of world is heralded in poetry, without yet becoming manifest as the history of being. The world-historical thinking of Hölderlin that speaks out in the poem "Remembrance" is therefore essentially more primordial and thus more significant for the future than the mere cosmopolitanism of Goethe. For the same reason Hölderlin's relation to Greek civilization is something essentially other than humanism. When confronted with death, therefore, those young Germans who knew about Hölderlin lived and thought something other than what the public held to be the typical German attitude.

Homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world. Hence it is necessary to think that destiny in terms of the history of being. What Marx recognized in an essential and significant sense, though derived from Hegel, as the estrangement of the human being has its roots in the homelessness of modern human beings. This homelessness is specifically evoked from the destiny of being in the form of metaphysics, and through metaphysics

[a] *Plato's Doctrine of Truth*, first edition, 1947: Being itself preserves and shelters itself as this nearness.

is simultaneously entrenched and covered up as such. Because Marx by experiencing estrangement attains an essential dimension of history, the Marxist view of history is superior to that of other historical accounts. But since neither Husserl nor – so far as I have seen till now – Sartre recognizes the essential importance of the historical in being, neither phenomenology nor existentialism enters that dimension within which a productive dialogue with Marxism first becomes possible.

[171] For such dialogue it is certainly also necessary to free oneself from naive notions about materialism, as well as from the cheap refutations that are supposed to counter it. The essence of materialism does not consist in the assertion that everything is simply matter but rather in a metaphysical determination according to which every being appears as the material of labor. The modern metaphysical essence of labor is anticipated in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the self-establishing process of unconditioned production, which is the objectification of the actual through the human being, experienced as subjectivity. The essence of materialism is concealed in the essence of technology, about which much has been written but little has been thought. Technology is in its essence a destiny within the history of being and of the truth of being, a truth that lies in oblivion. For technology does not go back to the τέχνη of the Greeks in name only but derives historically and essentially from τέχνη as a mode of ἀληθεύειν, a mode, that is, of rendering beings manifest. As a form of truth technology is grounded in the history of metaphysics, which is itself a distinctive and up to now the only surveyable phase of the history of being. No matter which of the various positions one chooses to adopt toward the doctrines of communism and to their foundation, from the point of view of the history of being it is certain that an elemental experience of what is world-historical speaks out in it. Whoever takes "communism" only as a "party" or a "Weltanschauung" is thinking too shallowly, just as those who by the term "Americanism" mean, and mean derogatorily, nothing more than a particular lifestyle. The danger[a] into which Europe as it has hitherto existed is ever more clearly forced consists presumably in the fact above all that its thinking – once its glory – is falling behind[b] the essential course[18] of

[a] First edition, 1949: The danger has in the meantime come more clearly to light. The collapse of thinking back into metaphysics is taking on a new form: it is the end of philosophy in the sense of its complete dissolution into the sciences, whose unity is likewise unfolding in a new way in cybernetics. The power of science cannot be stopped by an intervention or offensive of whatever kind, because "science" belongs in the gathered setting-in-place [*Ge-stell*] that continues to obscure the place [*verstellt*] of the event of appropriation.

[b] First edition, 1949: Falling back into metaphysics.

a dawning world destiny that nevertheless in the basic traits of its essential provenance remains European by definition. No metaphysics, whether idealistic, materialistic, or Christian, can in accord with its essence, and surely not in [172] its own attempts to explicate itself, "get a hold on" this destiny, and that means thoughtfully to reach and gather together what in the fullest sense of being now is.[a]

In the face of the essential homelessness of human beings, the approaching destiny of the human being reveals itself to thought on the history of being in this, that the human being find his way into the truth of being and set out on this find. Every nationalism is metaphysically an anthropologism, and as such subjectivism. Nationalism is not overcome through mere internationalism; it is rather expanded and elevated thereby into a system. Nationalism is as little brought and raised to *humanitas* by internationalism as individualism is by an ahistorical collectivism. The latter is the subjectivity[b] of human beings in totality. It completes subjectivity's unconditioned self-assertion, which refuses to yield. Nor can it be even adequately experienced by a thinking that mediates in a one-sided fashion. Expelled from the truth of being, the human being everywhere circles around himself as the *animal rationale*.

But the essence of the human being consists in his being more than merely human, if this is represented as "being a rational creature." "More" must not be understood here additively, as if the traditional definition of the human being were indeed to remain basic, only elaborated by means of an existentiell postscript. The "more" means: more originally and therefore more essentially in terms of his essence. But here something enigmatic manifests itself: the human being is in thrownness. This means that the human being, as the ek-sisting counterthrow [*Gegenwurf*] of being,[c] is more than *animal rationale* precisely to the extent that he is less bound up with the human being conceived from subjectivity. The human being is not the lord of beings. The human being is the shepherd of being. Human beings lose nothing in this "less"; rather, they gain in that they attain the truth of being. They gain the essential poverty of the shepherd, whose dignity consists in [173] being called by being itself into the preservation of being's truth. The call comes as the throw from which the thrownness of Da-sein

[a] *Plato's Doctrine of Truth*, first edition, 1947: What is it that now is – now in the era of the will to will? What now is, is unconditional neglect of preservation [*Verwahrlosung*], this word taken in a strict sense in terms of the history of being: *wahr-los* [without preservation]; conversely: in terms of destining.

[b] First edition, 1949: Industrial society as the subject that provides the measure – and thinking as "politics."

[c] First edition, 1949: Better: within being qua event of appropriation.

derives. In his essential unfolding within the history of being, the human being is the being whose being as ek-sistence consists in his dwelling in the nearness of being. The human being is the neighbor of being.

But – as you no doubt have been wanting to rejoin for quite a while now – does not such thinking think precisely the *humanitas* of *homo humanus?* Does it not think *humanitas* in a decisive sense, as no metaphysics has thought it or can think it? Is this not "humanism" in the extreme sense? Certainly. It is a humanism that thinks the humanity of the human being from nearness to being. But at the same time it is a humanism in which not the human being but the human being's historical essence is at stake in its provenance from the truth of being. But then does not the ek-sistence of the human being also stand or fall in this game of stakes? Indeed it does.

In *Being and Time* (p. 38) it is said that every question of philosophy "returns to existence." But existence here is not the actuality of the *ego cogito.* Neither is it the actuality of subjects who act with and for each other and so become who they are. "Ek-sistence," in fundamental contrast to every *existentia* and *"existence,"* is ek-static dwelling in the nearness of being. It is the guardianship, that is, the care for being. Because there is something simple to be thought in this thinking it seems quite difficult to the representational thought that has been transmitted as philosophy. But the difficulty is not a matter of indulging in a special sort of profundity and of building complicated concepts; rather, it is concealed in the step back that lets thinking enter into a questioning that experiences – and lets the habitual opining of philosophy fall away.

It is everywhere supposed that the attempt in *Being and Time* ended in a blind alley. Let us not comment any further upon that opinion. The thinking that hazards a few steps in *Being and Time* [174] has even today not advanced beyond that publication. But perhaps in the meantime it has in one respect come further into its own matter. However, as long as philosophy merely busies itself with continually obstructing the possibility of admittance into the matter for thinking, i.e., into the truth of being, it stands safely beyond any danger of shattering against the hardness of that matter. Thus to "philosophize" about being shattered is separated by a chasm from a thinking that is shattered. If such thinking were to go fortunately for someone, no misfortune would befall him. He would receive the only gift that can come to thinking from being.

But it is also the case that the matter of thinking is not achieved in the fact that idle talk about the "truth of being" and the "history of being" is set in motion. Everything depends upon this alone, that the truth of being come to language and that thinking attain to this language. Perhaps, then,

language requires much less precipitate expression than proper silence. But who of us today would want to imagine that his attempts to think are at home on the path of silence? At best, thinking could perhaps point toward the truth of being, and indeed toward it as what is to be thought. It would thus be more easily weaned from mere supposing and opining and directed to the now rare handicraft of writing. Things that really matter, although they are not defined for all eternity, even when they come very late still come at the right time.

Whether the realm of the truth of being is a blind alley or whether it is the free space in which freedom conserves its essence is something each one may judge after he himself has tried to go the designated way, or even better, after he has gone a better way, that is, a way befitting the question. On the penultimate page of *Being and Time* (p. 437) stand the sentences: "The *conflict* with respect to the interpretation of being (that is, therefore, not the interpretation of beings or of the being of the human being) cannot be settled, [175] *because it has not yet been kindled.* And in the end it is not a question of 'picking a quarrel,' since the kindling of the conflict does demand some preparation. To this end alone the foregoing investigation is under way." Today after two decades these sentences still hold. Let us also in the days ahead remain as wanderers on the way into the neighborhood of being. The question you pose helps to clarify the way.

You ask, "Comment redonner un sens au mot 'Humanisme'?" "How can some sense be restored to the word 'humanism'?" Your question not only presupposes a desire to retain the word "humanism" but also contains an admission that this word has lost its meaning.

It has lost it through the insight that the essence of humanism is metaphysical, which now means that metaphysics not only does not pose the question concerning the truth of being but also obstructs the question, insofar as metaphysics persists in the oblivion of being. But the same thinking that has led us to this insight into the questionable essence of humanism has likewise compelled us to think the essence of the human being more primordially. With regard to this more essential *humanitas* of *homo humanus* there arises the possibility of restoring to the word "humanism" a historical sense that is older than its oldest meaning chronologically reckoned. The restoration is not to be understood as though the word "humanism" were wholly without meaning and a mere *flatus vocis* [empty sound]. The "*humanum*" in the word points to *humanitas*, the essence of the human being; the "-ism" indicates that the essence of the human being is meant to be taken essentially. This is the sense that the word "humanism" has as such. To restore a sense to it can only mean to redefine the meaning of the word.

That requires that we first experience the essence of the human being more primordially; but it also demands that we show to what extent this essence in its own way becomes destinal. The essence of [176] the human being lies in ek-sistence. That is what is essentially – that is, from being itself – at issue here, insofar as being appropriates the human being as ek-sisting for guardianship over the truth of being into this truth itself. "Humanism" now means, in case we decide to retain the word, that the essence of the human being is essential for the truth of being, specifically in such a way that what matters is not the human being simply as such. So we are thinking a curious kind of "humanism." The word results in a name that is a *lucus a non lucendo* [literally, a grove where no light penetrates].

Should we still keep the name "humanism" for a "humanism" that contradicts all previous humanism – although it in no way advocates the inhuman? And keep it just so that by sharing in the use of the name we might perhaps swim in the predominant currents, stifled in metaphysical subjectivism and submerged in oblivion of being? Or should thinking, by means of open resistance to "humanism," risk a shock that could for the first time cause perplexity concerning the *humanitas* of *homo humanus* and its basis? In this way it could awaken a reflection – if the world-historical moment did not itself already compel such a reflection – that thinks not only about the human being but also about the "nature" of the human being, not only about his nature but even more primordially about the dimension in which the essence of the human being, determined by being itself, is at home. Should we not rather suffer a little while longer those inevitable misinterpretations to which the path of thinking in the element of being and time has hitherto been exposed and let them slowly dissipate? These misinterpretations are natural reinterpretations of what was read, or simply mirrorings of what one believes he knows already before he reads. They all betray the same structure and the same foundation.

Because we are speaking against "humanism" people fear a defense of the inhuman and a glorification [177] of barbaric brutality. For what is more "logical" than that for somebody who negates humanism nothing remains but the affirmation of inhumanity?

Because we are speaking against "logic" people believe we are demanding that the rigor of thinking be renounced and in its place the arbitrariness of drives and feelings be installed and thus that "irrationalism" be proclaimed as true. For what is more "logical" than that whoever speaks against the logical is defending the alogical?

Because we are speaking against "values" people are horrified at a philosophy that ostensibly dares to despise humanity's best qualities. For what

is more "logical" than that a thinking that denies values must necessarily pronounce everything valueless?

Because we say that the being of the human being consists in "being-in-the-world" people find that the human being is downgraded to a merely terrestrial being, whereupon philosophy sinks into positivism. For what is more "logical" than that whoever asserts the worldliness of human being holds only this life as valid, denies the beyond, and renounces all "Transcendence"?

Because we refer to the word of Nietzsche on the "death of God" people regard such a gesture as atheism. For what is more "logical" than that whoever has experienced the death of God is godless?

Because in all the respects mentioned we everywhere speak against all that humanity deems high and holy our philosophy teaches an irresponsible and destructive "nihilism." For what is more "logical" than that whoever roundly denies what is truly in being puts himself on the side of nonbeing and thus professes the pure nothing as the meaning of reality?

What is going on here? People hear talk about "humanism," "logic," "values," "world," and "God." They hear something about opposition to these. They recognize and accept these things [178] as positive. But with hearsay – in a way that is not strictly deliberate – they immediately assume that what speaks against something is automatically its negation and that this is "negative" in the sense of destructive. And somewhere in *Being and Time* there is explicit talk of "the phenomenological destruction." With the assistance of logic and *ratio* often invoked, people come to believe that whatever is not positive is negative and thus that it seeks to degrade reason and therefore deserves to be branded as depravity. We are so filled with "logic" that anything that disturbs the habitual somnolence of prevailing opinion is automatically registered as a despicable contradiction. We pitch everything that does not stay close to the familiar and beloved positive into the previously excavated pit of pure negation, which negates everything, ends in nothing, and so consummates nihilism. Following this logical course we let everything expire in a nihilism we invented for ourselves with the aid of logic.

But does the "against" which a thinking advances against ordinary opinion necessarily point toward pure negation and the negative? This happens – and then, to be sure, happens inevitably and conclusively, that is, without a clear prospect of anything else – only when one posits in advance what is meant as the "positive" and on this basis makes an absolute and simultaneously negative decision about the range of possible opposition to it. Concealed in such a procedure is the refusal to subject to reflection this

presupposed "positive" together with its position and opposition in which it is thought to be secure. By continually appealing to the logical one conjures up the illusion that one is entering straightforwardly into thinking when in fact one has disavowed it.

It ought to be somewhat clearer now that opposition to "humanism" in no way implies a defense of the inhuman but rather opens other vistas.

"Logic" understands thinking to be the representation of beings in their being, which representation proposes to itself in the generality of the concept. [179] But how is it with meditation on being itself, that is, with the thinking that thinks the truth of being? This thinking alone reaches the primordial essence of λόγος, which was already obfuscated and lost in Plato and in Aristotle, the founder of "logic." To think against "logic" does not mean to break a lance for the illogical but simply to trace in thought the λόγος and its essence, which appeared in the dawn of thinking, that is, to exert ourselves for the first time in preparing for such reflection. Of what value are even far-reaching systems of logic to us if, without really knowing what they are doing, they recoil before the task of simply inquiring into the essence of λόγος? If we wished to bandy about objections, which is of course fruitless, we could say with more right: irrationalism, as a denial of *ratio*, rules unnoticed and uncontested in the defense of "logic," which believes it can eschew meditation on λόγος and on the essence of *ratio*, which has its ground in λόγος.

To think against "values" is not to maintain that everything interpreted as "a value" – "culture," "art," "science," "human dignity," "world," and "God" – is valueless. Rather, it is important finally to realize that precisely through the characterization of something as "a value" what is so valued is robbed of its worth. That is to say, by the assessment of something as a value what is valued is admitted only as an object for human estimation. But what a thing is in its being is not exhausted by its being an object, particularly when objectivity takes the form of value. Every valuing, even where it values positively, is a subjectivizing. It does not let beings: be. Rather, valuing lets beings: be valid – solely as the objects of its doing. The bizarre effort to prove the objectivity of values does not know what it is doing. When one proclaims "God" the altogether "highest value," this is a degradation of God's essence. Here as elsewhere thinking in values is [180] the greatest blasphemy imaginable against being. To think against values therefore does not mean to beat the drum for the valuelessness and nullity of beings. It means rather to bring the clearing of the truth of being before thinking, as against subjectivizing beings into mere objects.

The reference to "being-in-the-world" as the basic trait of the *humanitas* of *homo humanus* does not assert that the human being is merely a "worldly" creature understood in a Christian sense, thus a creature turned away from God and so cut loose from "Transcendence." What is really meant by this word would be more clearly called "the transcendent." The transcendent is a supersensible being. This is considered the highest being in the sense of the first cause of all beings. God is thought as this first cause. However, in the name "being-in-the-world," "world" does not in any way imply earthly as opposed to heavenly being, nor the "worldly" as opposed to the "spiritual." For us "world" does not at all signify beings or any realm of beings but the openness of being. The human being is, and is human, insofar as he is the ek-sisting one. He stands out into the openness of being. Being itself, which as the throw has projected the essence of the human being into "care," is as this openness. Thrown in such fashion, the human being stands "in" the openness of being. "World" is the clearing of being into which the human being stands out on the basis of his thrown essence. "Being-in-the-world" designates the essence of ek-sistence with regard to the cleared dimension out of which the "ek-" of ek-sistence essentially unfolds. Thought in terms of ek-sistence, "world" is in a certain sense precisely "the beyond" within eksistence and for it. The human being is never first and foremost the human being on the hither side of the world, as a "subject," whether this is taken as "I" or "We." Nor is he ever simply a mere subject that always simultaneously is related to objects, so that his essence lies in the subject-object relation. Rather, before all this, the human being in his essence is ek-sistent [181] into the openness of being, into the open region that first clears the "between" within which a "relation" of subject to object can "be."

The statement that the essence of the human being consists in being-in-the-world likewise contains no decision about whether the human being in a theologico-metaphysical sense is merely a this-worldly or an other-worldly creature.

With the existential determination of the essence of the human being, therefore, nothing is decided about the "existence of God" or his "nonbeing," no more than about the possibility or impossibility of gods. Thus it is not only rash but also an error in procedure to maintain that the interpretation of the essence of the human being from the relation of his essence to the truth of being is atheism. And what is more, this arbitrary classification betrays a lack of careful reading. No one bothers to notice that in my essay "On the Essence of Ground" (1929) the following appears

(p. 28, note 1): "Through the ontological interpretation of Dasein as being-in-the-world no decision, whether positive or negative, is made concerning a possible being toward God. It is, however, the case that through an illumination of transcendence we first achieve *an adequate concept of Dasein*, with respect to which it can now be asked how the relationship of Dasein to God is ontologically ordered." If we think about this remark too quickly, as is usually the case, we will declare that such a philosophy does not decide either for or against the existence of God. It remains stalled in indifference. Thus it is unconcerned with the religious question. Such indifferentism ultimately falls prey to nihilism.

But does the foregoing observation teach indifferentism? Why then are particular words in the note italicized – and not just random ones? For no other reason than to indicate that the thinking that thinks from the question concerning the truth of being questions more primordially than metaphysics can. Only from the truth of being can the essence of the holy be thought. [182] Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word "God" is to signify. Or should we not first be able to hear and understand all these words carefully if we are to be permitted as human beings, that is, as eksistent creatures, to experience a relation of God to human beings? How can the human being at the present stage of world history ask at all seriously and rigorously whether the god nears or withdraws, when he has above all neglected to think into the dimension in which alone that question can be asked? But this is the dimension of the holy, which indeed remains closed as a dimension if the open region of being is not cleared and in its clearing[a] is near to humans. Perhaps what is distinctive about this world-epoch consists in the closure of the dimension of the hale [*des Heilen*]. Perhaps that is the sole malignancy [*Unheil*].

But with this reference the thinking that points toward the truth of being as what is to be thought has in no way decided in favor of theism. It can be theistic as little as atheistic. Not, however, because of an indifferent attitude, but out of respect for the boundaries that have been set for thinking as such, indeed set by what gives itself to thinking as what is to be thought, by the truth of being. Insofar as thinking limits itself to its task it directs the human being at the present moment of the world's destiny into the primordial dimension of his historical abode. When thinking of this kind speaks the truth of being it has entrusted itself to what is more essential than

[a] First edition, 1949: Clearing as clearing of self-concealing sheltering.

all values and all types of beings. Thinking does not overcome metaphysics by climbing still higher, surmounting it, transcending it somehow or other; thinking overcomes metaphysics by climbing back down into the nearness of the nearest. The descent, particularly where human beings have strayed into subjectivity, is more arduous and more dangerous than the ascent. The descent leads to the poverty of the ek-sistence of *homo humanus*. In ek-sistence [183] the region of *homo animalis*, of metaphysics, is abandoned. The dominance of that region is the mediate and deeply rooted basis for the blindness and arbitrariness of what is called "biologism," but also of what is known under the heading "pragmatism." To think the truth of being at the same time means to think the humanity of *homo humanus*. What counts is *humanitas* in the service of the truth of being, but without humanism in the metaphysical sense.

But if *humanitas* must be viewed as so essential to the thinking of being, must not "ontology" therefore be supplemented by "ethics"? Is not that effort entirely essential which you express in the sentence, "Ce que je cherche à faire, depuis longtemps déjà, c'est péciser le rapport de l'ontologie avec une éthique possible" ["What I have been trying to do for a long time now is to determine precisely the relation of ontology to a possible ethics"]?

Soon after *Being and Time* appeared a young friend asked me, "When are you going to write an ethics?" Where the essence of the human being is thought so essentially, i.e., solely from the question concerning the truth of being, and yet without elevating the human being to the center of beings, a longing necessarily awakens for a peremptory directive and for rules that say how the human being, experienced from ek-sistence toward being, ought to live in a fitting manner. The desire for an ethics presses ever more ardently for fulfillment as the obvious no less than the hidden perplexity of human beings soars to immeasurable heights. The greatest care must be fostered upon the ethical bond at a time when technological human beings, delivered over to mass society, can attain reliable constancy only by gathering and ordering all their plans and activities in a way that corresponds to technology.

Who can disregard our predicament? Should we not safeguard and secure the existing bonds even if they hold human beings together ever so tenuously and merely for the present? Certainly. But does this need ever release thought from the task of thinking what still remains principally [184] to be thought and, as being, prior to all beings, is their guarantor and their truth? Even further, can thinking refuse to think being after the latter has lain hidden so long in oblivion but at the same time has made itself known in the present moment of world history by the uprooting of all beings?

Before we attempt to determine more precisely the relationship between "ontology" and "ethics" we must ask what "ontology" and "ethics" themselves are. It becomes necessary to ponder whether what can be designated by both terms still remains near and proper to what is assigned to thinking, which as such has to think above all the truth of being.

Of course if both "ontology" and "ethics," along with all thinking in terms of disciplines, become untenable, and if our thinking therewith becomes more disciplined, how then do matters stand with the question about the relation between these two philosophical disciplines?

Along with "logic" and "physics," "ethics" appeared for the first time in the school of Plato. These disciplines arose at a time when thinking was becoming "philosophy," philosophy ἐπιστήμη (science), and science itself a matter for schools and academic pursuits. In the course of a philosophy so understood, science waxed and thinking waned. Thinkers prior to this period knew neither a "logic" nor an "ethics" nor "physics." Yet their thinking was neither illogical nor immoral. But they did think φύσις in a depth and breadth that no subsequent "physics" was ever again able to attain. The tragedies of Sophocles – provided such a comparison is at all permissible – preserve the ἦθος in their sayings more primordially than Aristotle's lectures on "ethics." A saying of Heraclitus that consists of only three words says something so simply that from it the essence of *ethos* immediately comes to light.

[185] The saying of Heraclitus (Fragment 119) goes: ἦθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων. This is usually translated, "A man's character is his daimon." This translation thinks in a modern way, not a Greek one. ἦθος means abode, dwelling place. The word names the open region in which the human being dwells. The open region of his abode allows what pertains to the essence of the human being, and what in thus arriving resides in nearness to him, to appear. The abode of the human being contains and preserves the advent of what belongs to the human being in his essence. According to Heraclitus's phrase this is δαίμων, the god. The fragment says: The human being dwells, insofar as he is a human being, in the nearness of god. A story that Aristotle reports (*De partibus animalium*, A, 5, 645 a17ff.) agrees with this fragment of Heraclitus. It runs:

Ἡράκλειτος λέγεται πρὸς τοὺς ξένους εἰπεῖν τοὺς βουλομένους ἐντυχεῖν αὐτῷ, οἳ ἐπειδὴ προσιόντες εἶδον αὐτὸν θερόμενον πρὸς τῷ ἰπνῷ ἔστησαν, ἐκέλευε γὰρ αὐτοὺς εἰσιέναι θαρροῦντας· εἶναι γὰρ καὶ ἐνταῦθα θεούς ...

The story is told of something Heraclitus said to some strangers who wanted to come visit him. Having arrived, they saw him warming himself at a stove. Surprised, they

stood there in consternation – above all because he encouraged them, the astounded ones, and called to them to come in, with the words, "For here too the gods are present."

The story certainly speaks for itself, but we may stress a few aspects.

The group of foreign visitors, in their importunate curiosity about the thinker, are disappointed and perplexed by their first glimpse of his abode. They believe they should meet the thinker in circumstances that, contrary to the ordinary round of human life, everywhere bear traces of the exceptional and rare and so of the exciting. The group hopes that in their visit to the thinker they will find things that will provide material for entertaining conversation – at least for a while. The foreigners who wish to visit the thinker [186] expect to catch sight of him perchance at that very moment when, sunk in profound meditation, he is thinking. The visitors want this "experience" not in order to be overwhelmed by thinking but simply so they can say they saw and heard someone everybody says is a thinker.

Instead of this the sightseers find Heraclitus by a stove. That is surely a common and insignificant place. True enough, bread is baked here. But Heraclitus is not even busy baking at the stove. He stands there merely to warm himself. In this altogether everyday place he betrays the entire poverty of his life. The vision of a shivering thinker offers little of interest. At this disappointing spectacle even the curious lose their desire to come any closer. What are they supposed to do here? Such an everyday and unexciting occurrence – somebody who is chilled warming himself at a stove – anyone can find any time at home. So why look up a thinker? The visitors are on the verge of going away again. Heraclitus reads the frustrated curiosity in their faces. He knows that for the crowd the failure of an expected sensation to materialize is enough to make those who have just arrived leave. He therefore encourages them. He invites them explicitly to come in with the words εἶναι γὰρ καὶ ἐνταῦθα θεούς, "Here too the gods come to presence."

This phrase places the abode (ἦθος) of the thinker and his deed in another light. Whether the visitors understood this phrase at once – or at all – and then saw everything differently in this other light the story does not say. But the story was told and has come down to us today because what it reports derives from and characterizes the atmosphere surrounding this thinker. καὶ ἐνταῦθα, "even here," at the stove, in that ordinary place where every thing and every circumstance, each deed and [187] thought is intimate and commonplace, that is, familiar [*gebeuer*], "even there" in the sphere of the familiar, εἶναι θεούς, it is the case that "the gods come to presence."

Heraclitus himself says, ἦθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων, "The (familiar) abode for humans is the open region for the presencing of god (the unfamiliar one)."

If the name "ethics," in keeping with the basic meaning of the word ἦθος, should now say that ethics ponders the abode of the human being, then that thinking which thinks the truth of being as the primordial element of the human being, as one who eksists, is in itself originary ethics. However, this thinking is not ethics in the first instance because it is ontology. For ontology always thinks solely the being (ὄν) in its being. But as long as the truth of being is not thought all ontology remains without its foundation. Therefore the thinking that in *Being and Time* tries to advance thought in a preliminary way into the truth of being characterizes itself as "fundamental ontology." It strives to reach back into the essential ground from which thought concerning the truth of being emerges. By initiating another inquiry this thinking is already removed from the "ontology" of metaphysics (even that of Kant). "Ontology" itself, however, whether transcendental or precritical, is subject to critique, not because it thinks the being of beings and in so doing reduces being to a concept, but because it does not think the truth of being and so fails to recognize that there is a thinking more rigorous than conceptual thinking. In the poverty of its first breakthrough, the thinking that tries to advance thought into the truth of being brings only a small part of that wholly other dimension to language. This language even falsifies itself, for it does not yet succeed in retaining the essential help of phenomenological seeing while dispensing with the inappropriate concern with "science" and "research." But in order to make the attempt at thinking recognizable and at the same time understandable for existing philosophy, it could at first be expressed only within the horizon of [188] that existing philosophy and the use of its current terms.

In the meantime I have learned to see that these very terms were bound to lead immediately and inevitably into error. For the terms and the conceptual language corresponding to them were not rethought by readers from the matter particularly to be thought; rather, the matter was conceived according to the established terminology in its customary meaning. The thinking that inquires into the truth of being and so defines the human being's essential abode from being and toward being is neither ethics nor ontology. Thus the question about the relation of each to the other no longer has any basis in this sphere. Nonetheless, your question, thought in a more original way, retains a meaning and an essential importance.

For it must be asked: If the thinking that ponders the truth of being defines the essence of *humanitas* as ek-sistence from the latter's belongingness to being, then does thinking remain only a theoretical representation

of being and of the human being; or can we obtain from such knowledge directives that can be readily applied to our active lives?

The answer is that such thinking is neither theoretical nor practical. It comes to pass [*ereignet sich*] before this distinction. Such thinking is, insofar as it is, recollection of being and nothing else. Belonging to being, because thrown by being into the preservation of its truth and claimed for such preservation, it thinks being. Such thinking has no result. It has no effect. It satisfies its essence in that it is. But it is by saying its matter. Historically, only one saying [*Sage*] belongs to the matter of thinking, the one that is in each case appropriate to its matter. Its material relevance is essentially higher than the validity of the sciences, because it is freer. For it lets being – be.

Thinking builds upon the house of being, the house in which the jointure of being, in its destinal unfolding, enjoins the essence of the human being in each case to dwell in the truth of being. [189] This dwelling is the essence of "being-in-the-world." The reference in *Being and Time* (p. 54) to "being-in" as "dwelling" is not some etymological play. The same reference in the 1936 essay on Hölderlin's word, "Full of merit, yet poetically, man dwells upon this earth," is not the adornment of a thinking that rescues itself from science by means of poetry. The talk about the house of being is not the transfer of the image "house" onto being. But one day we will, by thinking the essence of being in a way appropriate to its matter, more readily be able to think what "house" and "dwelling" are.

And yet thinking never creates the house of being. Thinking conducts historical eksistence, that is, the *humanitas* of *homo humanus*, into the realm of the upsurgence of healing [*des Heilen*].

With healing, evil appears all the more in the clearing of being. The essence of evil does not consist in the mere baseness of human action, but rather in the malice of rage. Both of these, however, healing and the raging, can essentially occur in being only insofar as being itself is in strife. In it is concealed the essential provenance of nihilation. What nihilates comes to the clearing as the negative. This can be addressed in the "no." The "not" in no way arises from the no-saying of negation. Every "no" that does not mistake itself as willful assertion of the positing power of subjectivity, but rather remains a letting-be of ek-sistence, answers to the claim of the nihilation that has come to the clearing. Every "no" is simply the affirmation of the "not." Every affirmation consists in acknowledgment. Acknowledgment lets that toward which it goes come toward it. It is believed that nihilation is nowhere to be found in beings themselves. This is correct as long as one seeks nihilation as some kind of being, as an existing quality in beings. But

in so seeking, one is not seeking nihilation. Neither is being any existing quality that allows itself to be ascertained among beings. [190] And yet being is more in being[a] than any beings. Because nihilation occurs essentially in being itself we can never discern it as something in beings. Reference to this impossibility never in any way proves that the origin of the not is no-saying. This proof appears to carry weight only if one posits beings as what is objective for subjectivity. From this alternative it follows that every "not," because it never appears as something objective, must inevitably be the product of a subjective act. But whether no-saying first posits the "not" as something merely thought, or whether nihilation first requires the "no" as what is to be said in the letting-be of beings – this can never be decided at all by a subjective reflection of a thinking already posited as subjectivity. In such a reflection we have not yet reached the dimension where the question can be appropriately formulated. It remains to ask, granting that thinking belongs to ek-sistence, whether every "yes" and "no" are not themselves already eksistent in the truth of being. If they are, then the "yes" and the "no"[b] are already intrinsically in thrall to being. As enthralled, they can never first posit the very thing to which they themselves belong.

Nihilation unfolds essentially in being itself, and not at all in the existence of the human being – so far as this existence is thought as the subjectivity of the *ego cogito*. Existence [*Dasein*] in no way nihilates as a human subject who carries out nihilation in the sense of denial; rather, Da-sein nihilates inasmuch as it belongs to the essence of being as that essence in which the human being ek-sists. Being nihilates – as being. Therefore the "not" appears in the absolute Idealism of Hegel and Schelling as the negativity of negation in the essence of being. But there being is thought in the sense of absolute actuality as the unconditioned will that wills itself and does so as the will of knowledge and of love. In this willing being as will to power is still concealed. But just why the negativity of absolute subjectivity is "dialectical," and why nihilation comes to the fore through this dialectic but at the same time is veiled in its essence, cannot be discussed here.

[191] The nihilating in being is the essence of what I call the nothing. Hence, because it thinks being, thinking thinks the nothing.

To healing being first grants ascent into grace; to raging its compulsion to malignancy.

[a] First edition, 1949: Insofar as being lets beings "be."

[b] First edition, 1949: Affirmation and denial, acknowledgment and rejection already used in the gathered call [*Geheiß*] of the event of appropriation – called into renunciative saying in response [*Entsagen*] to the gathered call of the distinction.

Only so far as the human being, ek-sisting into the truth of being, belongs to being can there come from being itself the assignment of those directives that must become law and rule for human beings. In Greek, to assign is νέμειν. Νόμος is not only law but more originally the assignment contained in the dispensation of being. Only this assignment is capable of enjoining humans into being. Only such enjoining is capable of supporting and obligating. Otherwise all law remains merely something fabricated by human reason. More essential than instituting rules is that human beings find the way to their abode in the truth of being. This abode first yields the experience of something we can hold on to. The truth of being offers a hold for all conduct. "Hold" in our language means protective heed. Being is the protective heed that holds the human being in his ek-sistent essence to the truth of such protective heed – in such a way that it houses ek-sistence in language. Thus language is at once the house of being and the home of the human essence. Only because language is the home of the essence of the human being can historical humankind and human beings not be at home in their language, so that for them language becomes a mere container for their sundry preoccupations.

But now in what relation does the thinking of being stand to theoretical and practical comportment? It exceeds all contemplation because it cares for the light in which a seeing, as *theoria*, can first live and move. Thinking attends to the clearing of being in that it puts its saying of being into language as the home of eksistence. Thus thinking is a deed. But a deed that also surpasses all *praxis*. Thinking permeates action and production, not through the grandeur of its achievement and not as a consequence of [192] its effect, but through the humbleness of its inconsequential accomplishment.

For thinking in its saying merely brings the unspoken word of being to language.

The usage "bring to language" employed here is now to be taken quite literally. Being comes, clearing itself, to language. It is perpetually under way to language. Such arriving in its turn brings ek-sisting thought to language in its saying. Thus language itself is raised into the clearing of being. Language thus *is* only in this mysterious and yet for us always pervasive way. To the extent that language that has thus been brought fully into its essence is historical, being is entrusted to recollection. Ek-sistence thoughtfully dwells in the house of being. In all this it is as if nothing at all happens through thoughtful saying.

But just now an example of the inconspicuous deed of thinking manifested itself. For to the extent that we expressly think the usage "bring to

language," a usage destined to language, thinking only that and nothing further, to the extent that we retain this thought in the heedfulness of saying as what in the future continually has to be thought, we have brought something of the essential unfolding of being itself to language.

What is strange in this thinking of being is its simplicity. Precisely this keeps us from it. For we look for thinking – which has its world-historical prestige under the name "philosophy" – in the form of the unusual, which is accessible only to initiates. At the same time we conceive of thinking on the model of scientific knowledge and its research projects. We measure deeds by the impressive and successful achievements of *praxis*. But the deed of thinking is neither theoretical nor practical, nor is it the conjunction of these two forms of comportment.

Through its simple essence, the thinking of being makes itself unrecognizable to us. But if we become acquainted with the unusual character of the simple, then another plight immediately befalls us. The suspicion arises that such thinking of [193] being falls prey to arbitrariness; for it cannot cling to beings. Whence does thinking take its measure? What law governs its deed?

Here the third question of your letter must be entertained: Comment sauver l'élément d'aventure que comporte toute recherche sans faire de la philosophie une simple aventurière? [How can we preserve the element of adventure that all research contains without simply turning philosophy into an adventuress?] I shall mention poetry now only in passing. It is confronted by the same question, and in the same manner, as thinking. But Aristotle's words in the *Poetics*, although they have scarcely been pondered, are still valid – that poetizing is truer than the exploration of beings.

But thinking is an *aventure* not only as a search and an inquiry into the unthought. Thinking, in its essence as thinking of being, is claimed by being. Thinking is related to being as what arrives (*l'avenant*). Thinking as such is bound to the advent of being, to being as advent. Being has already been destined to thinking. Being *is* as the destiny of thinking. But destiny is in itself historical. Its history has already come to language in the saying of thinkers.

To bring to language ever and again this advent of being that remains, and in its remaining waits for human beings, is the sole matter of thinking. For this reason essential thinkers always say the Same. But that does not mean the identical. Of course they say it only to one who undertakes to meditate on them. Whenever thinking, in historical recollection, attends to the destiny of being, it has already bound itself to what is fitting for it, in accord with its destiny. To flee into the identical is not dangerous. To

venture into discordance in order to say the Same is the danger. Ambiguity threatens, and mere quarreling.

The fittingness of the saying of being, as of the destiny of truth, is the first law of thinking – not the rules of logic, which can become rules only on the basis of the law of being. [194] To attend to the fittingness of thoughtful saying does not only imply, however, that we contemplate at every turn *what* is to be said of being and *how* it is to be said. It is equally essential to ponder *whether* what is to be thought is to be said – to what extent, at what moment of the history of being, in what sort of dialogue with this history, and on the basis of what claim, it ought to be said. The threefold issue mentioned in an earlier letter is determined in its cohesion by the law of the fittingness of thought on the history of being: rigor of meditation, carefulness in saying, frugality with words.

It is time to break the habit of overestimating philosophy and of thereby asking too much of it. What is needed in the present world crisis is less philosophy, but more attentiveness in thinking; less literature, but more cultivation of the letter.

The thinking that is to come is no longer philosophy, because it thinks more originally than metaphysics – a name identical to philosophy. However, the thinking that is to come can no longer, as Hegel demanded, set aside the name "love of wisdom" and become wisdom itself in the form of absolute knowledge. Thinking is on the descent to the poverty of its provisional essence. Thinking gathers language into simple saying. In this way language is the language of being, as clouds are the clouds of the sky. With its saying, thinking lays inconspicuous furrows in language. They are still more inconspicuous than the furrows that the farmer, slow of step, draws through the field.